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DSHS launches “don’t hang up” on Washington Relay telephone calls campaign today in Eastern Washington

OLYMPIA -- An operator’s voice on the telephone announcing “Washington Relay” means a person or business is about to hear from a deaf or hard-of-hearing person – not a telemarketing pitch.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) today is launching a public service announcement campaign in Eastern Washington to inform individuals and businesses that Washington Relay Service calls means a person with a hearing loss is trying to get in touch and to stay on the line.

“Our message is **Don’t Hang Up on Relay**,” said Eric Raff, director of the DSHS Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH).

He explained Washington Relay Service call agents connect hearing people to deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind and speech-disabled people through specialized communications equipment distributed by ODHH or purchased by their owners. Washington Relay callers use such equipment as teletypewriters, including those with Braille, to type text messages to the agents who read the messages to friends, business associates and others and type text-based responses to the callers in return.

Raff said there are approximately 15,000 people relying on Washington Relay who make approximately 80,000 relay calls per month in the state.

ODHH is partnering with Sprint to run a series of televised public service announcements that underline the “don’t hang up” message.

The announcements feature workers at a catering business receiving a call from a relay agent who announces it is “Washington Relay”. A worker at the catering business almost hangs up, thinking the call is a telemarketer. In fact, it is a call from a client who wants the caterer to feed a 200-person party.

The public service announcement will run in Western Washington this summer.

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